

VALERIAN.

OR,

The Virtues of that Root

IN

NERVOUS DISORDERS;

AND

The CHARACTERS which distinguish the
TRUE from the FALSE.

By JOHN HILL, M. D.

Illustrated with FIGURES.

THE SECOND EDITION.



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VALERIAN R. I. A. N.

VIA VITAE OF THE ROOT

NERVOUS AFFECTIONS

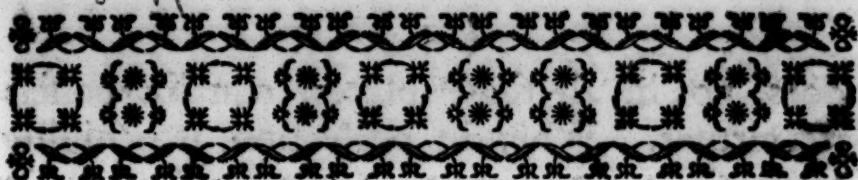
Of the Nature of the Root

PHYSICIANS find uncertainty in the effects of Valerian; and the medicine has lost some part of its credit. I beg they will bear the following reasons.

When the causes of that uncertainty are shown, the remedy will be easy.

By the application to the roots of botany becomes slight to mankind, and is a mistake. The science is to little cultivated in England. Some think the state of the roots and determine with freedom against drugs; and determine with freedom against the roots. But this cannot be expected from the physician, for the superior care of health does not allow them leisure; the age is not deficient in Hippocrates; but there wants a Celsus.

By VALERIAN we understand the root of the large wild plant of that name; its superior virtues having distinguished the other kinds. This grows on banks, by rivers, and in wood. out



VALERIAN.

CHAP. I.

Of the Nature of the Root.

 **PHYSICIANS** find uncertainty in the effects of Valerian; and the medicine has lost some part of its credit: I beg they will hear the following reasons. When the causes of that uncertainty are shewn, the remedy will be easy.

By the application to these purposes botany becomes useful to mankind: and 'tis a misfortune the science is so little cultivated in England. Some should enquire into the state of drugs; and determine with equal freedom against ignorance and fraud: but this cannot be expected from the physicians; for the superior care of health does not allow them leisure: the age is not deficient in HIPPOCRATES's; but there wants a *Cratevas*.

By VALERIAN, we understand the root of the large wild plant of that name: its superior virtues having banished the other kinds. This grows on heaths, by rivers, and in woods: but

does, not in all these places, equally possess its virtues. When in perfection, it is highly aromatick: we know that quality depends in a great measure, on sun and air; and is impaired always, and often destroyed utterly, by shade and water. Therefore the roots of Valerian which grow upon dry hills and sun-burnt heaths, possess its virtues in the highest degree; and such only should be used in medicine. Unhappily the plant is more common by waters; and the roots are in wet places larger, and more easily taken up. A pound of these is brought into the shops for every dram of the other: and as they are greatly inferior in their qualities, the physician is disappointed who depends on them.

Not only the virtues, but the stature, colour, and whole aspect of the plant are altered by this watery nourishment: and though in reality the two kinds are only varieties, occasioned by the different soil; yet they are so considerable, that Ray and others have given the mountain Valerian, a distinct place in their catalogues; accounting it a different species from that growing by waters.

In woods it assumes a form distinct from both; and properly is of a middle kind between them. Its virtues are also of a middle character; inferior to those of the heath, and superior to those of water Valerian.

The excellence of Heath Valerian is such, that no other should be used; and there is enough of it for the demand. The distinction is obvious, as will appear by the succeeding

ing characters : and as the term WILD belongs equally to the wood and water kinds, as well as to the true, it may be proper to distinguish that hereafter by the name HEATH VALERIAN.

C H A P. II.

Description of the Plant, and of the fresh Root.

THE root is composed of many fibres joined to a small oblong head. The stalk is erect, round, jointed, hollow, and toward the bottom, reddish. The leaves stand in pairs; and each is composed also of many lesser leaves joined to a long rib, with an odd one at the end. The flowers are small and reddish; and they stand in large tufts at the tops of the stalk and branches. Each flower is formed of one piece; and is tubular at the base, swelled out on one side, and cut into five parts at the rim. It has no cup: and it is followed by a single seed.

This is the form of the plant in whatever soil it grows. The distinctions of the heath from the water Valerian are these.

The HEATH VALERIAN is about two feet and a half high. The stalk is of a dusky green, and lightly hairy: the leaves are smaller than in the water kind; and the little leaves of which each of the larger is composed, are narrower, and of a deeper colour: these are also covered with fine white hairs. The flowers are of a brighter red; and the clusters of them are smaller. The seed also is less.

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The WATER VALERIAN is four feet high. The stalk is of a pale green, and thick; the leaves are large, smooth, and broad, and they are also of a fresh pale green. The flowers are paler; but larger, and more conspicuous than in the other; and the seed is larger and softer.

This is the distinction of the plants at full growth: but as the best time of gathering the root is before the stalk rises, 'tis necessary they should be known asunder also in that state. The place might indeed be a sufficient direction: for no one would go to gather the root by a river, when he has been told the Water Valerian is of less value. But that such as have not opportunities of taking it up themselves, may have some mark by which to know when it is genuine, it may be proper to add, that many such leaves as we have described on the stalk, rise also immediately from the root; and the same distinction is preserved in them: these in the Heath Valerian, are composed of narrower parts, and are hairy and dusky in colour; in the Water Valerian, they are bright, smoother, and pale.

The great distinction is in the root itself. This in the true heath kind, is of a fine brown colour, tending to olive; and consists of long slender fibres, which have a multitude of smaller threads growing from their sides in the manner of short curled hairs. The root of the Wood Valerian is of a tawny or deep brownish yellow.

The root of the Water Valerian, is of a pale brown tending to yellow; and is composed of thicker and more naked fibres: and there is lately introduced a kind which has grown in absolute water. This is white, and is worst of all. The root of the Heath Valerian is firm and tough; the root of the water kind is tender and more easily broken: the Heath Valerian root has a fresh aromack scent, with a very little foetidness. The water kind has nothing of this freshness in the scent, and little of the aromack; but is in a manner heavy and foetid only.

By these characters the two plants will be known in whatever period of growth; and even the roots when brought without any part of the plant. But as many have not opportunities of seeing these when fresh, it will be proper to observe also its condition dry, at the drug-gifts. These are supplied with it by persons who want knowledge, and often honesty: there is therefore no dependance, except upon the absolute aspect of the drug. The distinction in this article is the more necessary; because the plant must be wild to have its virtue. Garden culture debases it almost as much as a watery nourishment abroad. This I have found by trial: and where a drug must be received from such hands, as usually deal in Valerian, it is necessary to be very well acquainted with its genuine characters.

C H A P. III.

The History of the Valerian of the Druggists.

THE Valerian sold at our druggists is collected by a kind of itinerant medicine-mongers, whom from the principal article in which they deal, we call VIPER-CATCHERS: these people who travel over the greatest part of the kingdom in search of those animals, bring in also saffron, Valerian roots, and some other articles.

As they find a hundred plants of the Water Valerian for one of the Heath or Wood kind, that is, the root they usually collect: if the other falls in their way, and will come easily out of the ground, as it will in the looser heath soils after rains, they mix it with the rest: if not, they let it alone entirely: so that we sometimes meet with great quantities of the water kind only; and sometimes with a mixture of one and the other. The first should be refused entirely, and the latter carefully picked. Besides this mixture, they put in also the roots of a small Meadow Valerian, a distinct species of plant: and others kind less pardonably. I have raised a plant of the smooth water crowfoot, which is poisonous, from a root sold among Wild Valerian.

Even this is not all the disadvantage. The time when roots have their full virtue is before they shoot up a stalk; but this plant is most obvious when in flower: the root also at that time

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is looser in the ground, and the stalk is a handle by which it is easily pulled up. For these reasons a great part of what is brought into the shops has been taken out of the earth when the plant was in flower ; and is therefore, even though the kind were right, unfit for use in medicine. Of all these imperfections the druggist should beware, for his care will make the gatherers honest: if he be negligent, the apothecary should refuse to take such as is bad into his shop ; and in case of both these being careless, the patient may examine the root himself, according to the following characters.

C H A P. IV.

Description of the false Valerian Root when dry.

THE WATER VALERIAN ROOT dried is brittle and of a pale brown, approaching to yellow : it is composed of many rounded fibres, often entirely *naked*, or at the best hung with a very few threads ; and at the head there are commonly seen the *remains* of a *stalk*, with a hollow equal to that of a goose quill. Among the true fibres of the root, are also several long and *thick strings* of a paler colour, and *jointed* as it were with a kind of dent at each joint. These are the creeping appendages of the root, by which it runs under the surface : they have nearly the nature of stalks, and are as destitute of virtue as so many straws. When the real fibres are tasted, they are a little acrid, but *faint*, and a foetid scent is perceived in them while

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chewing. If they are broken, they appear *hollow* in the midst, or at the best dark and *blackish*. In the first case, the pith of the root is consumed, which is the common state of it it after the plant has flowered: the other is the natural condition of it in watery places, and the certain sign of its wanting strength. The substance which surrounds the pith in the Valerian root, contains its greatest virtue. This is spongy and woody in the Water Valerian, but in the heath kind, it is firm, and contains a substance approaching to the nature of a gum-resin. This the watery nourishment cannot supply: and therefore this part in the Water Valerian is perishable, which in the other is permanent.

C H A P. V.

Description of the true Heath Valerian Root when dry.

THE TRUE HEATH VALERIAN ROOT is composed of long and slender fibres: it is *tough* and of a *dusky brown*, approaching to *olive* colour; and the fibres are hung about with *numerous threads*: when broken, they have no hollow in the centre, nor any blackish circle there, but appear full and bright; and if the root has been gathered in perfection, there is a circle of a greenish or pale hue surrounding the pith.

The taste differs from the other much more than the colour, or form: it is acrid, spicy, and pleasant:

pleasant ; and after it has been chewed some time, there is perceived a slight bitterness and some astringency. It may be always known by this from the false ; which is vapid and sweetish, scarce at all aromack, and destitute entirely of this latent bitterness and astringency.

Its virtues depend wholly on the principles which give this taste and flavour, and they cannot be found in the other disagreeable and offensive kind.

This is the root, and this only, which should be gathered for medicinal use, and it is indeed a very valuable and noble medicine. A physician of distinguished abilities, one of the censors of the college*, has told me, that in a late search they found this true Valerian Root at one, and only one shop in London ; the powder was of an olive brown, and the scent aromack and agreeable : at other places, the powder was of a yellowish brown, and the scent offensive.

This true kind is liable like the false, to have runners mixed among the real fibres ; and they should be separated : it may be easily seen whether the plant has been in stalk at the time of its being gathered, and if it have, the root should be rejected. 'Tis only in perfection when preparing to shoot a stem : and whoever will gather it at that time, will find this kingdom affords drugs equal to those of the warmest climates.

* DR. CONYERS.

C H A P. VI.

Farther Trials of the two Roots.

Valerian root is sometimes altered a little in colour, from the foulness left about it at the time of gathering; or from ill management in drying. In this case, let some of it be put into cold water, and stand twenty-four hours. This never fails to distinguish the water from the heath kind; for the Water Valerian root becomes yellower, as it swells, and the other gets more of the olive brown than it had while dry.

The scent of the two roots also distinguishes them; if they have not lain together: the true is fragrant, though with a mixture of the fœtid kind; the other absolutely stinks, and has scarce any thing of the aromack scent.

Cats, who have much more distinguishing organs of smell than we, perceive this. There are certain scents which affect them, and they are principally of the fœtid kind; though this is not without exception: they will busy themselves extremely about the Water Valerian root; but shew little regard to the other.

C H A P. VII.

Of gathering the Root.

THESE are the characters by which the true Heath Valerian is to be known from the false, usually sold under its name.
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When a parcel of this right kind is purchased, before it is used, it should be picked ~~and~~ and cleaned: those roots which shew they have borne a stalk, are to be rejected; and the runners, or jointed and light strings must be separated from the true fibres. Thus the druggist will be sure he sells what the doctor prescribes: but there still may remain a doubt about its value. The high flavour of the Valerian root is lost in long keeping, and the virtue in great part goes with it.

This root should never be used when it is more than one year old from the gathering: and the seller's word is not to be taken on this account, for he is always interested to call the old new.

Under these disadvantages to which the purchase of Valerian is subjected on all hands, nothing can be so rational as the patient's collecting it for himself. Where that cannot be done, let him be guided by the same rules in the purchase, that he would observe in collecting it. Let him buy it fresh; at a right season of the year; and in the perfect state and condition: this he will know by the following rules.

Roots we see possess their virtues in greatest perfection when they are ready for shooting up a stalk, but have not yet made the effort. "Till that time they are imperfect, because they have not obtained their full maturity; and after that they are exhausted. The ultimate end of nature in the growth of plants, is the formation of the seeds: when these are perfected the
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root is no longer useful: it becomes a stick: and while the stalk is in its growth, the rich juices are sent up so fast to it, that the root is in great part drained of them. Therefore, neither when the plant is in flower, nor when it is about to flower, should its root be gathered for medicinal purposes. While it has only the radical leaves it may: but the best time of all is just when the bud of the stalk is forming.

The growth of the Valerian is this. In July it flowers; in August the seeds are ripe; and the winds carrying them off, they strike root. The rains of autumn favour this; and a small cluster of leaves is formed: these, with the root, continue growing till the severest frosts; or in mild winters through the whole season.

At the time when the seeds fall, those runners before-mentioned, rising from the head of the old roots, spread themselves just under the surface, or sometimes upon it, and taking root, they also form new plants. Each shoots up a cluster of leaves, and sends fibres into the earth, just as the seedlings.

Among the roots we buy at the druggists, some are large and light; others small and more firm: the large ones are often such as have been pulled up by the stalk, at, or after the time of flowering, which are therefore in a great degree exhausted. The small ones are the roots of seedling plants, and of those propagated by the runners. which have been taken up late in autumn, or early in spring: and these having been in their earliest state of growth, have not
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their full virtue. This is the condition of the single roots brought to sale ; and in the clusters of them, there is the greatest uncertainty : the larger part being exhausted, and often rotten ; and the rest imperfect.

The true season for gathering Valerian root is the middle of May, and the finest are those of seedling plants. These are known by standing single ; those from runners being always near old roots. These seedlings have had the autumn and winter for taking their first growth. The warmth and moisture of spring have now given them their full bigness, and toward the middle of May, the rudiment is formed, which is to shoot up into a stalk. The root is then full of its richest juice : and this is the proper season for gathering it.

In the system of vegetation, this is an universal truth : the root which has produced a stalk, and ripened flowers and seeds becomes an absolute chip, and has neither medicinal qualities, nor any other value. The purpose of nature is answered, and the whole plant dies. The MUSA will live a century if it does not flower, but when it has once bloom'd, no art can preserve it from immediate decay. The MOUNTAIN PALM, will live thirty or forty years barren ; but if it flowers it instantly decays : and the TREE LAVATERA, which bears our winters even for many years till it blows, perishes as soon as that is over. Even annuals, by preventing their flowering, are kept alive thro' winter. In the bulbous kinds the root decays visibly ; and in the fibrous it has the same fate, though

though less observed. The carrot which has run to seed, is an insipid stick : and in the potatoe, though fresh roots are produced abundantly, that which was put into the ground in spring, and which has borne the summer stalk is useless.

The gardener thinks he takes up in July the same bulb of the tulip, which he planted in November; but he deceives himself : that which he sets in autumn furnishes the flower in the succeeding summer ; and, as it feeds the stalk, decays. Another bulb is formed during this time, which contains the rudiment of the next year's flower : this encreases as the other withers ; and having attained its full growth by the middle of summer, the gardener takes it up, and supposes it to be the same he planted.

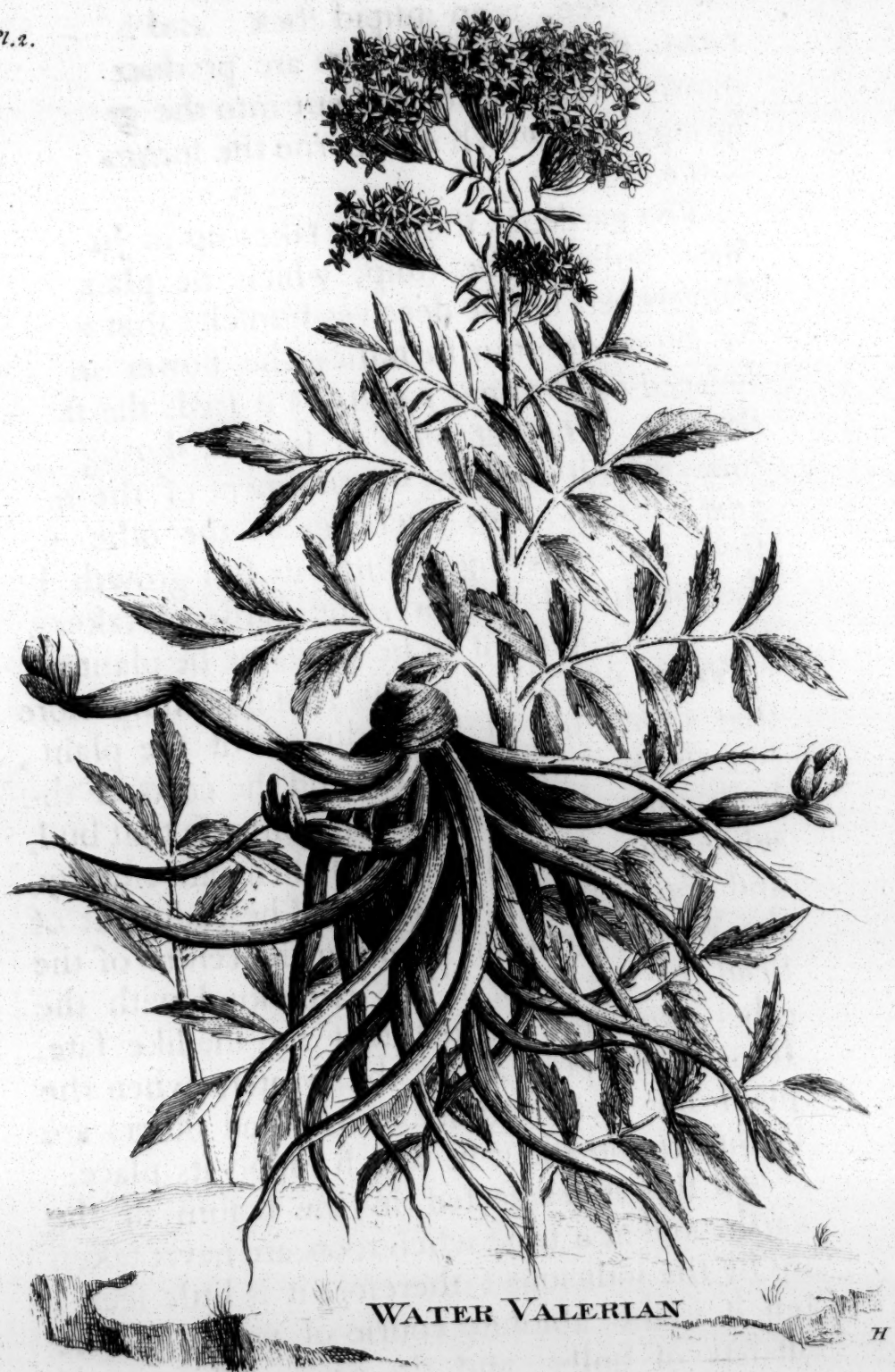
What we call a bulbous root is nothing more than a covering of the rudiment of the plant ; like the bud upon a tree : and the coats of the bulb, like the films, which compose that bud, when they have performed their office decay, and are renewed no more. The rudiment of the Valerian plant is a bud in the centre of the head of the root, of the same kind with the other two ; and the root itself has the like fate. It naturally perishes in the winter, when the plant has perfected its seeds ; and others are formed round about it, which supply its place.

All this is transacted in the bosom of the earth, and at a time when roots are never taken up by the judicious : therefore it is little seen ; but it is the absolute course of nature. The off-sets of bulbs, and the encreased parts of
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fibrous roots, which the gardener separates in parting them at autumn, are all formed in this manner; containing the rudiments of new plants, and supplying the place of the old roots, which decayed in flowering.

It is necessary so much should be known, to direct us in the proper gathering of roots; and thus the philosophy of plants may serve the purposes of medicine.

C H A P. VIII.

The Manner of curing Valerian Root.

VALERIAN is in its greatest perfection when fresh dried; but the curing of medicinal roots, is a subject we do not rightly manage in England. The *Ginseng* of the East-Indies, and the *Salep* of the Turks, are instances that others have an art unknown to us. We cannot preserve any root as they do *Ginseng*; and with regard to *Salep*, our own *Orchis* would perfectly answer its purpose, if we had the same method of preparing it. This is not so difficult as may be thought; but it would be wandering from the present purpose, to speak farther of the matter here.

When the Valerian roots are gathered, let the dirt be shook from them, but not by striking them against hard substances. It will separate with little violence; and they must neither be bruised nor washed. Let the leaves and runners be cut off clean without wounding the head of the root, and then lay the whole

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parcel in a heap in an airy place, where the sun does not come: cover them with a blanket, and leave them thus three days: then string them up on long threads at ten inches distance root from root, and hang these threads across an airy room.

When they are perfectly dry, put them up in boxes, pressing them close together, and covering them carefully.

Such as think laying the fresh root in heaps, before it is hung up to dry, a strange practice, may be reminded of the custom in regard to fruits, whether intended for keeping, or for wine. Those who understand their management, always give them a sweating of this kind, for heightening their flavour, and improving their natural qualities.

The gardener lays his pears in a heap, and covers them with flannel, before he spreads them to keep for winter: and in the cyder countries, apples are treated in the same manner before pressing; and in the wine countries, grapes.

A slight fermentation is thus brought on by the warmth of the substances; and their flavour and virtues are exalted and improved. I don't know that the same practice has been applied to roots before, but the effect is similar; and those who have not been accustomed to Valerian otherwise than as seen in the shops, would scarce suppose this the same medicine: it is highly aromatick, quick, and pungent on the tongue, and the peculiar flavour in it, which we call foetid, scarce deserves so coarse a name.

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The root of Heath Valerian in this state possesses all the virtues which have been ascribed to it by authors : it is a sovereign medicine in nervous disorders, and in particular exceeds all the remedies commonly used against that worst of head-achs, which arises from attention.

It has alone cured epilepsies : and of late it has been used very successfully in hysteric complaints ; and in that terrible disorder the convulsive asthma. It alleviates pain in the manner of the more gentle opiates ; and it is found highly effectual in fits proceeding from the obstructions of the menses ; not only taking off the symptoms but removing the cause. Perhaps this root may be found, on experience, one of the best of our emmenagogues ; and I would request those who have more opportunities to try it farther in that intention.

A very large dose of the fresh root will purge ; but this is its least useful quality. I have ordered it lately in that troublesome disease the nightmare ; and in two instances, wherein I have had fair opportunities to try its virtue, have found it a perfect cure.

A very good method of taking it is fresh dried in the way of tea, a dram of the root for a dose, with half a pint of boiling water ; sweetened and softened with a little milk : but of all the preparations, a tincture fully saturated with the ingredient must be the best. The root possesses its full virtue only when it is fresh dried, after it has been taken up at the season just named. At that time of the year it is excellent in powder, or in

the tea-infusion; but no method of keeping will preserve it in that perfect state : therefore the best recourse is to this form ; and proof spirit is capable of receiving so strong a tincture from it, that a small dose will have great virtue. I have this year obtained from different parts of England a large quantity of the true root, and have found that an excellent tincture may be made from it in the following proportions.

Cut a pound and four ounces of the root just dried into small pieces, and bruise it in a mortar ; put this into a gallon of proof-spirit ; let it stand four days, shaking it every day ; then strain off the liquor, pressing it hard. Put to this a pound of the root, bruised as before, and let it stand a week : after that strain and filter the tincture. A table spoonful is a dose.

I have made a quantity in this manner, which is at the service of my friends, or of the faculty ; the rest of the root I have given to Mr. Tomson, a very worthy young man, who proposes to make it for the publick.

One farther improvement it is proper I name here, though sufficient experience has not yet confirmed me in its use : this is an ACID TINCTURE OF VALERIAN. I have made this by adding two ounces of oil of vitriol to a pint of the preceding tincture, and have found it excellent : the acid exalts the flavour of the Valerian, and this tincture strengthens the stomach, creates an appetite, and always prevents that disorder of the head, to which nervous persons are subject after eating. The dose of the Valerian
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being limited by the acid, the plain tincture may be also taken at other times.

The roots sold by druggists differ extremely in colour, taste, smell, and qualities; as they have been gathered in more or less favourable situations and soils: the difference between the false and the true root, is that the one has grown in barren and dry ground; and the other in wet and muddy; and in consequence there are as many degrees of excellence or defect in the drug, as there are of soils between those two.

There are several parts of England, where the true kind is to be had in plenty. On the great heath called Hind-Head, in the road to Portsmouth, I have seen a vast quantity of it; and Ray names it upon sufficient authority near Ashwood, by the Buxton-wells, in Derbyshire; at Parnham, between Brindale and Orford, in Suffolk, and on Ilford Common.

The chief places whence the roots are brought for sale are four; the neighbourhood of Cambridge, the forest of Dean in Gloucestershire, Oxford, and the near part of Kent. The Cambridge and Kentish Valerian generally have a mixture of good and bad, for they pull up some from the heaths and high grounds, which they mix among the water kind: what I have seen from about Oxford, has more of the Water Valerian; and from the forest of Dean comes the purest and best our druggists have: but this, like the rest, though the kind be better, is commonly taken up at a wrong season.

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'Tis said none is imported : but I have found among parcels of it some roots of a kind differing in colour from almost any of the English sorts ; and also the tuberous white roots of the *nardus montana radice olivari*, which is a valerian, not native of this kingdom ; therefore those parcels of the drug probably came from France, and could not but be worse for the keeping : it does not appear that any part of the world produces this drug in greater perfection than our own country, provided the soil and situation be proper.

That soil, and situation, can make so considerable a difference in the virtues of plants, appears from various instances in nature ; and as plainly from the effects of culture. Lavender and other aromattick herbs, are sweeter, and fuller of virtue in those kingdoms where they grow wild, than with us who raise them only in gardens ; and many which we have wild in common with the south of France, are yet greatly superior in their qualities there.

Culture renders the common garden plants larger and more succulent ; but it takes off their taste and qualities : and the difference between the Heath and Water Valerian is very like that of a wild and garden herb ; the situation in the muddy bank of a ditch, giving abundant moisture and nourishment.

We see the same plant is more richly flavoured when it grows in a dry soil, and more insipid when in wet : and we find the highest aromatticks are natives of dry and
warm

warm lands: indeed to know the effect of abundant moisture and rich earth, we need look no farther than the common lettuce. In the wild state, wherein it lives on dry, parched, and barren ground, its juice is acrid and bitter, and its virtue highly narcotick; so much as to have obtained it the name of poisonous: in gardens where it has rich mould, and abundant moisture, it becomes mild, pleasant, and innocent. Nor does the form differ less: when wild the stalk is woody, and the leaves are prickly: when cultivated the stem is tender, and the leaves are unarmed. So the austere crab of the common, becomes the mellow apple of the orchard; and the bitter almond, sweet.

The case is the same in all these instances: the virtues or the qualities of the herb, root, or fruit, depend upon the natural and moderate quantity of juices elaborated, undisturbed in the vessels; and well concocted by the sun: this gives the taste, scent, flavour, and medicinal qualities. When nature throws its seeds in a rich wet soil, or human industry removes them to the garden, the character of the plant is altered, the effective particles are debased or drowned among the additional quantity of juice, and the whole becomes in the end tasteless, scentless, inefficacious, and insipid.

On these principles the culture of the Valerian must never be attempted; and in its wild state, so much depends upon the nature of the soil and season of the year, that it is happy the characters of excellence and imperfection

fection are marked so strongly on the root itself. Those who neglect to observe them will be disappointed in their expectations from this drug, though in reality it possesses all the virtue that has been ascribed to it; and deserves more commendation than has been given even by its warmest advocates.

THE END.



Directions for placing the PLATES.

PLATE I. to face page 4.
PLATE II. to face page 6.

